The 1992 and 2004 Olympic games as image improvement strategies

S. Milionis
National Technical University of Athens, Greece

Abstract

The paper focuses on an analysis of the impact of the 1992 Olympic Games in terms of image creation and enhancement for the city of Barcelona. It examines the process by which this image improvement took place within the framework of the forthcoming Olympics, and furthermore assesses the overall effect of that improvement in economic and social respects. Finally, it investigates the possibility for replication of this new paradigm of image enhancement in the case of the forthcoming Athens 2004 Olympic Games.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which big bang events are able to contribute to the improved image of the host city. In order to pursue the aforementioned aim, the case study of the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona will be employed. In 1992, Barcelona and Spain received visitors to the Games from all over the world. The main issues that arise in this case are related not only to the number of visitors, but more importantly, to the social and economic effects of hosting the Games. The essential questions that come up at this point can be summarised as follows: How far has the event helped to make Barcelona more attractive? What has the Games meant for the image of Barcelona and Spain? What are the great challenges for the coming years? Can other cities hosting such events benefit from the experience of Barcelona? This paper will attempt to shed some light on how Barcelona and Spain have made use of the Games to increase their appeal to residents, companies and visitors, and under what circumstances this experience could be replicated in the case of Athens 2004.
2 The Olympic games as a necessity

Barcelona used the Olympics to “put the city on the map”. Due to decentralisation and deindustrialisation phenomena coupled with the economic restructuring of the world economies, Barcelona was in desperate need to find a method to gain the funding necessary to restructure the city in a way that would allow it to compete in the world city economies. In 1981, Barcelona mayor decided to enter the bid to host the Olympic Games [1]. It would be misleading to present the Olympic Games as the starting plan to rejuvenate the city. In actual fact, there had always been plans and the beginning to achieve expansion and a regeneration project dated back to the ‘70s [ibid]. However, these plans never came to light. Lluis Armet, then deputy mayor made it clear that the upheaval of the city would require significant sums of money and public transport improvements as it would be the people having to deal with the regeneration processes [ibid]. Mr. Armet also made it clear that hosting the Olympic Games would be a means to an end [ibid]. It must be acknowledged that given the scale of hosting such an event as the Olympic Games, and especially needing to improve on certain facilities before others it is understood that many projects would be left unfinished during the time of the Games. Nonetheless, these projects would have been initiated because of the Games and would continue to be built after the event was over.

3 The legacy of the Olympic games

The 1992 Olympic Games mark a turning point in the history of Barcelona. The city can be regarded as a classical example of how to use a major sports event as a stimulus for product development and city promotion. The Games have made a considerable contribution to the transformation of an industrial harbour city to an attractive and service-oriented Mediterranean city. The city council has used the event as a lever towards political consensus for a large-scale urban renewal programme, which was a crucial part of the bid book. After Barcelona's assignment in 1987, a Strategic Plan (Barcelona 2000) was drawn up, based on the assumption that the investments related to the Games should primarily aim at long-term effects. The basic idea was to use the event to put into practice a vision that already existed: to consolidate Barcelona as an enterprising European metropolis by making the city more attractive [2].

There were three basic preconditions that had to be met in order to bring about the desired renewal. First, the necessary funding from the public and the private sector had to be ensured. Second, a high degree of political consensus had to be achieved. Third, the whole effort had to be supported by citizens and actors involved. The course of restructuring the city moved along three axes; the opening of Barcelona towards the Mediterranean Sea, the investments made for the improvement of the road network and the improvement of the living conditions through the construction of the four Olympic parks.
4 Barcelona’s city marketing strategy

4.1. Introduction

According to Berg, Braun and Otgaard [3] (2000: 32) Barcelona, like many other second cities, aims at a specific profile to obtain a status comparable to that of European capitals. Barcelona has succeeded in obtaining the status of the event city and using the events as catalysts for urban development. This strategy was already used in 1888, when an international exhibition stimulated the construction of Eixample and the industrialisation of the city. An international exhibition in 1929 resulted in the construction of the underground system and the city’s westward extension.

When Spain became a democracy in the late 70’s, Barcelona started to work out a strategy to develop the city in a positive direction. The city realised that sports and the Olympic Games in particular could play a part in that strategy.

4.2. Local government involvement in promoting the city

According to Borja [4], the city government quickly made a special effort to restore or create an attractive urban environment by many different means: improving the city’s appearance and security, creating small parks wherever possible, encouraging neighbourhood and city-wide festivals, reviving traditions (such as processions and carnivals) and other similar activities. At the same time, internal promotional campaigns were launched, some of a general kind (“Barcelona for ever”), others having to do with urban renewal (“Barcelona look your best”) and yet others involving public services (markets, public transport, clean streets, and so on) [ibid].

The “Barcelona look your best” campaign was a major promotional venture on the part of the municipality, which does the advertising, seeks sponsors to renovate important buildings and gives economic assistance to individuals. The campaign had encouraged thousands of citizens to repaint buildings, overhaul services and modernize their homes and businesses (almost 5,000 such projects were carried out).

When the campaigns were of a general kind, they were always linked to actual events, such as Barcelona’s bid for the Olympic Games, or, in the case of more specific campaigns, to improved services. Cultural projects (such as museums, exhibitions and concerts) and sporting events constituted a particularly important feature of this policy of integration and promotion [ibid].
The public and private sectors cooperated for the worldwide promotion of Barcelona. Some permanent joint institutions and societies, such as the Tourist Consortium set up by the municipal government, the Hotel Owners Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the Trade Fair and similar bodies were created, and temporary associations, such as the European Agency for Medicines and the European Federal Bank, were set up for specific purposes [ibid].

4.3. Local government involvement in marketing the city

The city council’s role for carrying out the process of organising the Games and reforming the city required strong management and coordination [5]. The heavy investment enabled the city to adapt infrastructures for the Games while simultaneously developing and modernising the city with exceptional speed [ibid]. Similar to the London Docklands case, once the government realised the size of the development to be undertaken, it organised the equivalent to an urban development corporation, plus various other municipal limited companies [6]. In Barcelona’s case it was HOLSA and because of the Olympics, COOB ’92. The city hall made no secret that it saw the Games simply as “a means to an end” [7]. The Olympics gave the city an image [8]. An image the local government wanted to capitalise on to further improve the standards of the city, physically and economically.

Barcelona was looked upon as a product that needed to be sold [9]. The city of Barcelona, despite the slight economic decrease after the Games, decided to continue with marketing the city using an international economic promotional approach [ibid: 139]. Simply this was done by taking maximum advantage of the investments in infrastructure and the image developed for the Games in Barcelona.

The city has succeeded in turning its image about by means of the 1992 Olympic Games. That event has been instrumental to many objectives of urban policy, including that of changing the city’s image. Before, during and after the Games, the city profited from positive media coverage. Both the event and the urban renewal programme generated much free publicity as is illustrated by the fact that the number of journalists covering the event reached a world record. Nor did the media stop paying attention after the Games: they went on to cover the massive renewal projects. Obviously, Barcelona has established its own brand, and now finds itself in the luxurious position where other actors (such as travel agencies and the higher layers of government) invest in the continuity of Barcelona’s “brand”.

4.4. Promotional activities after the games

4.4.1. The Turisme de Barcelona organisation

Promotional activities did not cease after the Games were over. On the contrary, according to Berg, Braun and Otgaar [10] Barcelona is still promoted by several organisations on various spatial levels. On the municipal level, Turisme de Barcelona aims to promote the city as a tourist destination. The City Council, the
Chamber of Commerce, and the Foundation Barcelona Promocio founded this organisation in 1993. Since 1994, the promotion strategy of Barcelona has been changed from a general approach into a differentiated approach. Each promotion campaign is adjusted to the demands of a specific target group. Consequently, Barcelona is presented in several ways: as a destination for theatre lovers, young people and so on [ibid]. Moreover, Turisme de Barcelona decided to put the city on the map as a city-trip destination rather than a sun-and-beach destination. After one year of negotiating and paying money to be included in the brochures, tour operators were convinced of the qualities of the city and could no longer afford to exclude it.

The target groups of the city promotion change from time to time. Turisme de Barcelona is continuously searching for new target groups by contacting relevant organisations in foreign countries. This way of promoting the city is considered more effective and much cheaper than forms of general promotion.

4.4.2. Funding of the Turisme de Barcelona organisation

The target group strategy is complementary to the more general promotion strategies of the Catalan and national tourist boards. These organisations do have a budget for advertisements, while Turisme de Barcelona uses its budget to invite tour operators and journalists. The budget is financed by the Municipality, the Chamber of Commerce and the resources generated by such tourist products as Barcelona Bus Turistic, Barcelona Card, Barcelona Pass, Barcelona Walking Tours and others. These products try to make the city as accessible as possible by offering visitors a wide choice of alternatives.

5 Athens’s double candidacy for the Games

The chronicle of Athens’s double bid for the Games was one of the most interesting (and stressful for Athenians and Greeks in general) in two respects. First, because it took place twice, initially with an attempt (bid for the 1996 Olympics) that resulted in failure, followed by another bid (bid for the 2004 Olympics) that was successful. Second, because the way in which this historical evolution of the bidding process took place demonstrates the changes that have come into effect as regards the conceptualisation of the Games in the contemporary era, in contrast to the former notions that dominated the early years of its modern rejuvenation. The following extract even though it describes those changes with a dose of cynicism not to say irony, nevertheless it provides an accurate explanation of the nature and character of contemporary Olympic Games. “several cities competed vigorously to be the site of the 1996 Olympics, among them Athens, Atlanta, Minneapolis. Athens marketed itself to the Olympics Committee for more than an three year period, arguing that 1996 marked the 100th anniversary of the modern Olympics and that both the ancient and modern Olympics began in Greece. Athens was the bookmaker’s favourite by 7-2 odds. The Olympics Committee decision, announced in September 1990, surprised everyone: Athens was turned down in favour of Atlanta. Why was Athens denied this honour? One possibility is that Athens and Greece are less
stable politically and more subject to possible terrorism. In their disappointment and rage, however, the Athenians claimed that the Olympic Committee sold out to the Coca-Cola company and CNN (both based in Atlanta), believing that the Olympics would earn more money in Atlanta than in Athens. The truth is that Athens is correct on all accounts and more. Atlanta had a clearer focus in its marketing plans for the Olympics. It was a comprehensive and coordinated effort involving both the political and business communities. The Olympics was now a major economic place event, and the quaint, amateur style of a century ago had given way to modern stadiums, traffic control, television rights, and lobbying.” [11]. As Kotler suggests in one of his more recent books [12] and within the framework of the above line of reasoning, the selection of Athens for the 2004 games is a first class opportunity for the country to lay out viable marketing plans.

6 Main Actors involved in the preparation of the 2004 Games

ATHENS 2004 is responsible for organising the 2004 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. ATHENS 2004 was established by Law 2598/1998 as the Organising Committee for the 2004 Olympic Games. It exercises all powers and authorities conferred to it by the Olympic Charter and the Host City Contract signed on September 5, 1997.

ATHENS 2004 is incorporated under the legal form of a société anonyme and is expressly excluded from application of provisions governing the public sector. ATHENS 2004 is considered to be a public sector "Awarding Authority" as per European Union Directives because the Greek State is the only shareholder, and its Board of Directors is appointed by decision of the Prime Minister.

The ATHENS 2004 Mission is to:

- To organise technically excellent Olympic Games
- To provide to the athletes, spectators, viewers and volunteers a unique Olympic experience, thus leaving a legacy for the Olympic Movement
- To reposition and promote the cultural and natural heritage of Greece to the eyes of the world

As far as supervision, coordination and monitoring of projects, actions and activities are concerned, there exists at the highest administrative level the so-called Interministerial Coordination Committee for Olympic Preparations. This committee is also responsible for the immediate resolution of all the legal, financial, or other kind of problems that may arise in relation to the 2004 Games. Chairman of the board is the prime minister and some of the other members of the committee include the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economics, Physical Planning, Development, Culture, Transport as well as the sub-ministers of Culture and Press. The president and the managing director of ATHENS 2004 also participate in the committee.

Furthermore, for the immediate and constant control of the implementation process of all projects, a Project Management Team chaired by the sub minister of culture was created. Special coordinator has been assigned the Secretary
General for the Olympic Games while all the Secretary General of the above mentioned ministries as well as the Managing Director of ATHENS 2004 and representatives of public sector actors also participated. More specifically, the Team is responsible for supervising all actions and activities related to the preparation and carrying out of the Games. In addition, it is responsible for the formulation of proposals to the Interministerial Coordination Committee for Olympic Preparations for all important matters that need to be tackled at that level. Moreover, it coordinates ministries and public sector actors whose responsibilities are related to the preparation and carrying out of the Games.

In order to facilitate the functioning of the Project Management Team, the Project Monitoring Team has been created. It is chaired by the sub minister of Culture and coordinated by the Secretary General for the Olympic Games. This team within which the Secretary General of the Ministry of Physical Planning, the Managing Director of ATHENS 2004, Secretary Generals of other ministries and representatives of public actors participate is more flexible than the previous one.

7 Conclusions

The 1992 Games constitute a turning point for the city’s history. Barcelona can be regarded as a classic example of how a major event can be used for the development of the product called “city” and its promotion. The Games contributed very much to the transformation from a harbour-based city to an attractive Mediterranean city oriented towards the service sector. The Council used the event as a lever for achieving political consensus with regard to a large-scale urban regeneration programme that was major part of the bidding process.

An important element of Barcelona’s sports image is the fact that the city hosted the Olympic Games – the world’s greatest event for 1992. This, not only contributed to the creation of a high quality sports infrastructure, but also to a more attractive city. Thus, Barcelona constitutes one of the most illustrative examples of how major sports events are used for urban marketing. Ten years after the Games were over, the city still remains very active within that area. Barcelona’s effort to use a new event (The Universal Forum of Cultures) for the regeneration of an old industrial area can be regarded as a token for the above statement.

Barcelona seized the opportunity offered by the hosting of the 1992 Games to win international renown and consequently, improve its image. The city enjoys an increasing popularity as a sports and convention city, and more and more business tourists also have discovered it. Leisure tourism has also benefited from the Games as it successfully promoted Barcelona as a tourist destination and attracted more visitors to the city than usual. As far as the social structure is concerned, one of the immediate effects of hosting the Games was the inspiration of feelings of pride and self-confidence among the Spanish population.

Undoubtedly, the Barcelona story is a success story. Whether Athens will be able to repeat such a success, lies mainly in its ability to take full advantage of the newly built institutional arrangements in the light of the forthcoming
Sustainable Planning and Development

Olympics (i.e. ATHENS 2004, Interministerial Coordination Committee for Olympic Preparations, Project Management Team, Project Monitoring Team and so on) in order to acquire the necessary organisational capacity that lacks heavily from the Greek realm. Greek engineers, architects are very well equipped to carry out all the necessary projects for the hosting of the Olympics, however, until the obstacle of organisational capacity and efficiency is overcome, one cannot expect miracles to happen. Maybe this lack of organisational efficiency could be the reason for the emergence of another important issue, the issue of transparency, which seems to exist in Greece only as a word in the dictionary.

References